



Organización
Internacional
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Executive summary

► Gender perspective in child labour

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This study seeks to understand, from a gender perspective, how the living conditions of families, how the professional careers of adults and how the sexual division of labour in households affect the associations that Children and Adolescents (C&As) establish with labour and how they affect the construction of expectations and imaginaries with respect to the future labour opportunities of C&As. The study is based on a critical analysis approach to child labour (CI). This approach acknowledges that the social relationships that are created within certain contexts determine not only how childhood is defined but also the conditioning factors and perceptions of C&As regarding participation in employment.

The study delves into how the gender dimension and how labour insertions and the professional careers of adults have an impact on the presence of CL and on the expectations of C&As regarding their futures in the working world. These dimensions were analysed in households of the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires (AMBA)¹ in 2020, a year in which the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to affecting the economy and employment, led to crises in areas related to social reproduction. The inputs for this analysis are the results of in-depth interviews that were conducted by the International Labour Organization as a part of the Measurement, Awareness-Raising and Policy Engagement Project to Accelerate Action against Child Labour and Forced Labour (MAP16), within which this report is framed. We pay special attention to not only gender inequalities and family

structures for household and care responsibilities but also to the introduction of C&As in productive activities (economic and non-economic).

Specifically, we study the reproduction of gender stereotypes and inequalities in girls in the form of remunerated work for the market and non-remunerated work in the household: by performing intensive domestic and/or care tasks (taking care of other children, of the elderly or of persons with special needs in the household). We thereby seek to explain the role played by gender socialization in the differences in access to education, training and labour insertion and seek explain how it has an impact on expectations and perceptions about the opportunities that the labour market can offer to young and adolescent girls in the future.

The first section presents the central aspects of the methodology that was applied: a qualitative methodological strategy was adopted to analyse the interviews conducted of adults and C&As of AMBA households. There were 46 in-depth interviews of various members of 17 households in a situation of social vulnerability in which there was at least one C&A who performed productive and/or reproductive tasks. Households were used as the collective unit of analysis, and the members of those households were taken as the individual unit of analysis. These members could be, as applicable, C&As from 13 to 17 years of age, their mothers, their fathers, their grandfathers and/or their grandmothers. The interviewed persons were selected considering the proportions of C&As

¹ AMBA is the common urban area composed of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA) and 40 municipalities of the suburbs in the province of Buenos Aires that are located around CABA.

by sex and zone of residence in AMBA. Because of Social, Preventive and Mandatory Distancing (“DISPO”) due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted virtually by video call between November and December 2020.

The interpretive paradigm was used as the basis of the study, which allows an in-depth approach and greater flexibility in the research process and in the interplay between theory and method. This approach enables us to understand the central aspects of the CL phenomenon from the gender perspective in order to learn about the work-related histories, practices and perceptions of the interviewed persons. The analysis of the professional careers of these people provides a potential way to comprehend gender and intergenerational inequalities, because it allows complementing the view of their current labour insertions with the path of work histories that led them to their current positions.

Subsequently, the pertinent academic bibliography is systematized to understand the relationship between gender and child labour and the possible conditioning factors. The results section presents the main findings with respect to the discourses, practices, experiences and customs of the families, which bear witness to the gender inequalities and give rise to the early introduction of C&As into work for the market and/or domestic work.

The final considerations provide a review of the main aspects of the analysis of the data revealed in the interplay between the theoretical and empirical antecedents that are developed. It is clearly shown that gender permeates transversally, not only regarding the decisions by families to promote the early inclusion of C&As in the labour market but also regarding the tasks they carry out, the space and conditions in which they perform those tasks and the expectations linked to the education of C&As and their future professional careers and life paths.

One of the notable conclusions of the study is the fact that not only did the pandemic caused by COVID-19 significantly worsen the living conditions of families at the lowest socio-economic levels, such as those comprised in the study sample, but it even more harshly affected the conditions of women, who have more intensely experienced the pre-existing care deficits that have become more

profound within this context. These women have low levels of income and education and have young children, and they are employed in activities with greater labour precariousness, but they do not have the coverage of current regulations and are more exposed to losing their job. The particular context of this study exposed the economic limitations and a deepening of the care deficits from which these families are suffering. During the pandemic, this has translated, on the one hand, into making use of the “additional worker strategy”, consequently inserting C&As into remunerated productive jobs so that they can contribute to the family economy; and on the other, it has translated into more time engaged in non-remunerated domestic and care tasks with intensities that characterize them as CL, above all for young and adolescent girls, as a way to collaborate in the family dynamics. In this regard, the question arises as to whether this introduction of C&As into CL within the context of the pandemic will be interrupted by the return to “normal”, or if it will become a permanent part of the economy and the dynamics of these families.

Contrary to what the law maintains and to the general consensus about the consequences of CL and about the violation of rights, upon investigating the family structures that exist and the culture and conceptions that families have about education, work and the future, the analysis became more complex, and the emerging connotation was not particularly negative (especially the connotations of adults). While CL is mentioned as a means for economic sustainability, it is mainly seen as a learning factor and as a way to instil discipline and to provide preparation for adult life. Yet in many cases contradictions emerge, and the aforementioned aspects are contrary to the descriptions given by the C&As themselves regarding the intensity of those jobs (long hours, physical exertion and considerable responsibility), which collide with the activities that C&As have to give up in order to work (play, friendships, study), something that is not fully perceived by adults. There is no mention of alternatives that would allow acquiring those skills and those desired behaviours, such as specific educational, recreational and sports activities for C&As that are available in the area.

Regarding education, given that the survey was conducted within a context of online education,

the school's role is blurred and hindered by the limitations posed by virtuality and a lack of connectivity in many cases. The fewer hours engaged in school and the need for income to gain access to connectivity also operated as conditioning factors that drove adolescents to undertake labour activities. Beyond the specific context of the pandemic, education continues to be the most relevant factor in the imaginary of these families as a way to access a life more full of rights and opportunities, with higher quality jobs: subjectively, education represents the possibility of upward mobility. Achieving this is almost exclusively associated with individual responsibility, with the effort of each person to get an education in order to get better jobs and achieve better living conditions, without questioning the role of the state or of companies in building not only rigidities in the labour market but also gender segregation, both horizontal and vertical. Significant gender differences between adults were observed within this dimension. Women assess education more highly as a potential facilitator of quality labour insertion and of greater freedom, something they did not have before (especially economic autonomy with respect to their spouses). Many mothers mention their own educational deficits as a consequence of having dropped out of school to take on domestic and care responsibilities. To combat this, they suggest that their children need to have more opportunities, especially based on education and on-the-job learning. They more fervently encourage their adult daughters to follow paths that are different from their own, more linked to studying and remunerated work, to independence and to the possibility of choosing what they want to be and do.

The analysis also shows that adults in the study had professional careers marked by situations of poverty and major limiting factors that also led them to join the labour market at an early age, to leave school and to take paths that have been marked by labour precariousness and instability. Profound gender differences are detected, sustained by a sexual division of traditional work, in which the role of caregiver is given almost exclusively to women, the majority of whom experienced the formation of a family and maternity as a "limiting factor" of their educational and professional development.

Nevertheless, attempts to break this pattern continue to coexist with the daily reproduction of gender stereotypes. The view that domestic tasks (whether intensive or not) and CL are an educational tool continues to remain strong, especially for girls. In addition to giving them skills for organizing their own homes as adults, it is seen as a way for them to join the labour market in domestic services as an alternative to difficulties related to obtaining more qualified jobs.

Upon investigating the possible transmission of these gender inequalities to C&As, we once again substantiated the coexistence of both ruptures and continuities. On the one hand, there are patterns according to which stereotypes are reproduced. These stereotypes are typically associated with whether or not activities are considered to be work (above all reproductive work); with the positions of women and men in the sexual division of labour in the household; and with the tasks that young and adolescent girls currently perform, which are linked to caregiver tasks and to roles that are historically considered to be feminine (scarcely valued and barely remunerated). On the other hand, there are glimpses of some attempts at rupture by adolescent girls, who are beginning to denaturalize generic roles with a view to the future. This denaturalization is taking place mainly in the decision to be included in the labour market in the future as a form of emancipation, and also in the decision to postpone motherhood in order to be able to study and work.

Based on the conclusions that are reached, policy recommendations for tackling the problem of CL from the gender perspective are offered. The importance of strengthening the role of the school as a place for containment, for learning and for breaking stereotypes is emphasized, therefore promoting teacher training (and consequent transmission to the entire educational community) on gender equality, on the definitions and regulations referring to CL and on recognizing the situations of C&As and the impacts on their well-being. This strategy has already been posed in the National Plan to Prevent and Eradicate Child Labour and Protect Adolescent Work 2018-2022. Furthermore, the need for more in-depth policies that are targeted at the cultural facet is clearly shown. Gender stereotypes in the forms of labour inclusion of men and women must be

questioned, as well as the division of productive and reproductive tasks, and these aspects must be the focal points of in-depth study at schools through integral sex education (ESI), such that changes happen and sensitivities are also instilled among males, who, given that they do not experience such inequalities personally, rarely recognize them or question them, thereby giving continuity to reproducing the sexualized meanings of activities. Along this line, we propose that interest should be generated in training young and adolescent girls in technical schools.

It is also important, starting at an early age, to foster the transmission of gender equality regarding the use of time: highlighting the importance of leisure and socialization for girls also, who tend to spend much more of their “free time” on learning and caring as preparation for their future social mobility, versus a greater naturalization of the freedom to use free time among boys. Regarding this point, schools can contribute to reinforcing such equality in the right of C&As to have free time, thereby attempting to break the stereotypes.

The evidence obtained shows that the infrastructure needs to be strengthened in order to ensure connectivity as a right, which is now clearly a basic right, so that C&As can access information and education in the online format.

Likewise, there is a notable need to strengthen the development of neighbourhood spaces of containment, linked to sports and vocational training, which should operate using resources and professionals funded by the State, thereby offering new points of reference for C&As about what to be and do. This would be an alternative to CL versus the myth that it is better to work rather than do nothing: occupy the “free” time of C&As on activities that allow learning skills and healthy routines and learning about sacrifice and discipline through play, without involving responsibilities that exceed their age but which, at the right time, can be applied in their professional performance. These spaces must also generate instances of awareness-raising that modify the view of CL and allow it to be seen as a violation of the rights of C&As, while also providing a way to understand its negative effects.

These policies must be supplemented, on the one hand, by changes to public actions, therefore

expanding those policies that had already begun to be designed and implemented and that promote defamiliarization and co-responsibility for care, as well as labour inspection at companies and social protection. It is particularly important to strengthen the protection and standardization of domestic services due to their implications for the family life of female workers, as well as advocate the social and economic value of those services.

On the other hand, among businesses, awareness-raising instances must be created, which should contribute to eliminating the usual gender stereotypes among employers and should question socially legitimized business policies related to the use of female employment as a means of flexibility through outsourcing that allocates precarious, part-time jobs, with flexible schedules and for a limited time only, justified by the need to apply work-life balance. In this regard, we have to do away with the imaginary that the female workforce is secondary (including their supplementary wages) and that there are certain jobs that are better suited to men and others that are better for women, consequently resulting in greater participation by women in certain sectors where the jobs are only part time and informal (lower wages and fewer possibilities of promotion). The State, together with unions, can support this process by generating incentives and disincentives as a part of the economic recovery strategies that are designed in the post-pandemic period and as requisites for accessing tax benefits and reductions, thereby promoting a reduction of horizontal and vertical segregation. It is very important that these measures also reach organizations of the popular economy, which have extensive presence and have been booming in recent years, above all during the pandemic, in order to offer decent and equal conditions to their workers.

Finally, new lines of research have arisen for analysing CL from the gender perspective in rural environments, where the modes of production activities, social relations and the social organization of care maintain differences with respect to the urban sphere. This research could serve as input for designing specific policies for those environments.

Everything must take place comprehensively, within the framework of an economic process that creates quality jobs for adults, together with the

development of an integrated care system that works jointly between the State, the private sector, the community and families. The final purpose must be to foster better living conditions for boys, girls and adolescents within a context of equal rights and opportunities.

